



JUSTICE TRUST PRESS CONFERENCE

Date/Venue: 12:00 p.m. (noon), Monday 16 March, 2015, Orchid Hotel (Restaurant) -- 91 Bo Hta Htaung Pagoda Road at corner of Anawyahtar Road, Yangon, Myanmar

RSVP to info@justicetrust.net

— A group of Buddhist monks who were severely injured at Letpadaung copper mine on 29 November, 2012 will announce the launch of a lawsuit against Home Affairs Minister General Ko Ko for ordering an illegal police action that used phosphorus munitions.

"We are seeking justice so that this never happens again," says U Tikha Nyana, who suffered disfiguring burns over 60% of his body and underwent multiple surgeries in a Bangkok hospital. *"If police are allowed to use chemical firebombs against peaceful monks without facing any penalty, how will we prevent them from abusing students and ordinary people who want to freely express their opinions?"*

More than 100 monks were hospitalized after the Letpadaung assault; 57 suffered deep burns requiring long-term medical care. They received no assistance from the government. Instead, monasteries were pressured to deny them residence and support.

Justice Trust, a human rights group that works to advance rule of law in Myanmar, is supporting the monks in this case. The monks sent a letter to President U Thein Sein requesting that the case be allowed to proceed in court, and visited Sarlingyi police station on March 11 to register the First Information Report (FIR). The police have not yet registered the case.

"The law requires police to register an FIR when there is clear evidence of a crime, but they won't do it if they are the ones who committed the crime," says U Aung Thane, a senior lawyer working with Justice Trust. *"Using chemical weapons against monks is an egregious violation that offended the entire country, so we will push this case all the way to the Supreme Court."*

In addition to the criminal case, the monks will bring a civil action seeking damages for ongoing medical treatment and an injunction to prevent the police from repeating the crime.

"This is a groundbreaking test case for Myanmar's legal system," says Roger Normand, Founder and Executive Director of Justice Trust. *"Under the junta, impunity for state crimes was the standard policy. If rule of law is to advance during this political transition, it is critical that senior government officials are held accountable when their orders result in gross violations of people's rights."*

Monks from the Saffron Revolution will also attend the press conference and present a public petition calling for justice. *"Our brother monks are being harassed by the authorities; the same thing happened to us after the Saffron Revolution,"* says Ashin Aw Bah Tha. *"We stand in solidarity with the victims of Letpadaung and ask concerned citizens to join this campaign for justice and accountability."*

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